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ABSTRACT

This paper provides guidelines for the development of three distinct approaches to teaching interpersonal communication: a humanistic approach, a skills-oriented approach, and a business-oriented approach. For each approach, it describes assumptions underlying the development of curriculum, suggests questions for use in the generation of study units, lists representative readings related to each question, and offers a sample list of course topics. The paper also discusses the origins of courses in interpersonal communication. (GW)

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# VALUE ORIENTATIONS

# IN

# TEACHING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper an effort is made to delineate the values associated with the business oriented, the skills oriented and the humanistic oriented approach to teaching interpersonal communication. Distinctions among the three represent degrees of difference rather than strong philosophical, theoretical or methodological cleavages. In a given interpersonal class the three approaches might be utilized simultaneously or sequentially; in some instances a single approach might be more appropriate.

The objective of this paper is to provide the reader with a set of alternative approaches to be considered when planning an interpersonal course. The explication of each approach follows a similar pattern. Assumptions underlying the development of curriculum are described, questions for use in the generation of study units are suggested, readings associated with each question are provided, and a sample list of topics is offered. The list of readings provided is representative rather than comprehensive. No suggestion is being made that these lists are definitive or consensual. In describing interpersonal communication topics and concepts limited reference has been made to the areas of counselling, interviewing and small group communication. Although these subjects are sometimes taught in interpersonal courses, they represent special communication environments, and they are beyond the scope of the general discussion presented here. For our purposes, interpersonal communication will be defined as:

> the investigation of relatively informal social situations in which persons in face-to-face encounters sustain a focused interaction through the reciprocal exchange of verbal and nonverbal cues.[1]

### The Origins of Interpersonal Courses

Many factors influenced the development of interpersonal courses; among these, the following seem prominent.

(1) Communication teachers read, and were influenced by humanistic psychologists like Maslow, Rogers, Schutz and May;

(2) In the late 1950s a change occurred in teaching philosophy and methodology in which the emphasis shifted from a public speaking orientation stressing information transmission and persuasion to one emphasizing transaction and understanding;

(3) Informal agreement was reached that communication study should focus on such concepts as: the basic elements of human communication e.g. sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, psychological factors influencing this process, attitudes, beliefs and values, needs, communication contexts, nonverbal variables, meaning, and the nature of transaction;

(4) Throughout the 1940s[2] and 1950s[3] interest continued to grow in business oriented communication courses.

Dissatisfaction with existing first year communication courses, the availability of a new set of humanistic variables, a more eclectic view of the field of speech communication, and a change in the values being associated with human communication study all contributed to the creation of interpersonal communication courses.

In describing three approaches to teaching interpersonal communication, no attempt has been made to suggest a hierarchy of concepts or a sequence in which principles might be taught. Such decisions must be influenced by the particular theoretical bias and interests of the teacher, the needs and capabilities of the students and the departmental structure in which the course is taught. Although, in terms of content, the boundaries of a given interpersonal course are permeable, decisions concerning the inclusion and exclusion of concepts require criteria. Distinctions between the skill and humanistic approaches may be clarified by acknowledging alternative interpretations of the nature of science. According to Williams:

> A physical science purports to deal with facts. Its aims are accurate measurement and prediction which presuppose explanations based on principles of causality and determinism. This is the physicalistic paradigm. A human science deals with meanings. It aims at sensitively accurate understandings of social and cultural experience which require explanations based on principles of teleology and voluntarism. This is the humanistic paradigm. [4]

Williams explains that a purely behavioristic approach to communication science does not provide explanations for behavior, ignores man's practical nature, and fails to aid in answering basic questions like what it means and how it feels to be understood, to be believed, etc. In contrast, the basis of Williams' humanistic paradigm is that communication is a relational process; emergent, transitional and formative. The subject matter to be pursued concerns the meanings that objects - physical, social or abstract - can have for human beings. Meanings, in this context, is viewed as a social product created and transformed through the defining activities of human beings as they transact.

The assumptions, questions, topics and readings associated with the skill-interpersonal class correspond with Williams' notion of a physical science orientation; characteristics of the humanistic class are consonant with Williams' humanistic paradigm. The physicalistic view stresses that environmental factors coupled with reinforcement processes affect behavior and learning; the view is deterministic. In contrast, the humanistic view emphasizes the importance of man's inner strivings in motivating him to create choices, to consider alternatives and to seek growth oriented change.

The business-interpersonal class, tracing its origins to the business and professional speaking classes of the 1940s and 1950s, claims as its domain those communication concepts and skills, and those organizational concepts and practices which can contribute to the efficiency, productivity and sales effectiveness of the organization.

FOOTNOTES

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## THE HUMANISTIC-ORIENTED INTERPERSONAL APPROACH

Assumptions underlying the development of a humanistic-interpersonal communication curriculum were derived from the literature of humanistic psychology, the sociology of symbolic interaction, social psychology and psychiatry. Representative assumptions are :

(1) The interpersonal communication environment should be characterized by trust, warmth and acceptance.

(2) Participants in an interpersonal meeting should be open, spontaneous and authentic.

(3) Participants should be willing to self disclose appropriately, and to listen empathetically.

(4) In an interpersonal encounter communication should be primarily in the here and now.

(5) The ideal for relationships between people is one of mutuality. Each person should recognize and value himself and recognize and value the other.

(6) Participants should recognize that such emotions as pain, conflict, grief, anger and guilt are parts of the human experience to be understood, not suppressed or hidden.

(7) Interpersonal communication experience should be growth facilitating.

(8) Students studying interpersonal communication should be willing to participate actively in the process by willingly sharing ideas and feelings, by taking a genuine interest in the ideas and feelings of others, and by accepting that human growth and change is necessary and desirable.

(9) Students studying interpersonal communication should develop habits which enable them to be introspective, analytical, questioning and participative.

(10) Students should be able to select appropriate strategies for identifying, interpreting and solving interpersonal problems.

(11) Students should be able to utilize interpersonal communication skills in the various communication environments of which they are a part.

(12) Students should realize that what we know about human interaction is tentative, that the generalizations made are open to critical examination, and that on-going controversy about human interaction is inevitable and desirable.

Questions to be Utilized in the Generation of Study Units

I What types of verbal and nonverbal messages contribute to the creation of a warm, trusting and accepting communication environment?

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## THE HUMANISTIC ORIENTED INTERPERSONAL APPROACH.

TOPICS

anxiety

trust

attitudes

beliefs

values

congruence

confirmation

change

self awareness

intrapersonal communication

transaction

confrontation

self disclosure

conflict resolution

barriers

facades

nonverbal communication

language development

processes of thinking and reasoning

intention

person perception

interpersonal attraction

empathy

general semantics

manipulation

control

games

bargaining and negotiating

interviewing

therapeutic communiation

needs

phatic communication

metacommunication

transactional analysis

## The Skills - Oriented Interpersonal Approach

The skills approach to the interpersonal course follows a traditional view of speech teaching. It assumes that just as the public speaking course should be designed to improve a speaker's thinking, reasoning and speaking processes, so too, the interpersonal course should be aimed at the improvement of an individual's skill in communicating in dyadic, face-to-face situations. From this viewpoint, the teacher-student relationship is comparable to that of doctor-patient.

The skills approach draws upon the literature associated with learning theory, information theory, and the behavioral and psychoanalytic schools of psychology and psychiatry. From these sources some representative assumptions can be stated.

(1) Communication is the arrangement of environmental stimuli to produce certain desired behavior on the part of the organism.

(2) A communication can achieve some changes in behavior through its own reinforcing power. A communication can acquire reinforcing power through other stimuli which are reinforcing.

(3) Since the aim of communication is to bring about a desired modification of behavior, the natural discriminative stimuli for the desired responses should be isolated and, if possible, incorporated in the communication.

(4) Since no communication is effective unless it is attended to, attending behavior must be reinforced.

(5) The most exact test of the comprehension of a communication is to discover whether the communication elicits the same responses from the recipient as it elicits from the communicator himself.

(6) Communication skills, like motor skills, are learned.

(7) Communication skills can be learned poorly.

(8) Training can induce re-learning and facilitate improved communication functioning.

(9) Conceptual understanding should accompany behavioral change.

(10) Skills learned in a laboratory environment can be transferred to out of laboratory situations.

(11) Students can learn procedures for communicating information about self to self.

(12) Students can learn procedures for communicating information about self to others.

(13) Students can learn procedures for more accurately communicating information to others.

(14) Students can learn to identify the characteristics of their communication style.

(15) Students can learn to identify the characteristics of the communication style of others.

Questions to Be Utilized in the Generation of Study Units.

I What models and principles are best suited to provide a conceptual framework from which a skills approach might be developed?

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## THE SKILL ORIENTED INTERPERSONAL APPROACH

### TOPICS

Information model

Information transmission

listening

feedback

interpersonal perception

social exchange

interpersonal interaction analysis

diagnostic tests

conditioning

behavior modification

learning

operant conditioning

regulation of behavior

reinforcement

programmed learning

training methodologies

measurement of communication skill development

classroom applications

influencing the communication behavior of children

## The Business-Oriented Interpersonal Approach

The interpersonal communication class designed for students intent on pursuing business oriented occupations draws upon the literature of human relations, human resources, organization management, personnel and interpersonal communication. From this literature certain assumptions can be drawn about work and communication.

(1) People attempt to satisfy many kinds of needs at work, not just economic ones.

(2) A worker is unique compared to other productive factors.

(3) A man must be motivated not only to do his job, but to strive constantly to improve his performance.

(4) Morale affects production.

(5) An organization must pay as much attention to human beings and their behavior toward each other as it does toward man's relation to economic factors, techniques and the organizational structure.

(6) The effectiveness with which any organization of people accomplishes its prescribed tasks while satisfying the needs of its members is greatly affected by the efficiency of communication between them.

(7) To increase productivity, efficiency and/or sales an organization must have efficient, satisfied, motivated workers; skilled, understanding and effective managers and well trained personnel, sales staff, etc.

(8) The plant, office or other organizational structure is a social system.

(9) More effective communication skills can be developed through programs of training.

(10) Business promotion is a communication process.

(11) Employee participation is often essential to higher productivity and greater satisfaction.

(12) An effective manager should use his experience, intuition and principles of interpersonal or human relations to guide his actions.

(13) Efficient interpersonal communication is a prerequisite to efficient organizational administration.

(14) Misunderstandings are often caused by the assumptions that one man makes about an other man's meaning and use of words.

(15) A close relationship exists between a manager's perception of a situation, the plans and procedures he chooses to handle it, and the communication necessary to understand and direct ongoing activity in relation to that situation.

Questions to be Utilized in the Generation of Study Units

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## THE BUSINESS-ORIENTED INTERPERSONAL APPROACH

### TOPICS

needs

motivation

general systems

channels

networks

feedback

human resources

information system

training methods and programs

interpersonal competence

attitudes

values

symbolic interaction

consistency theory

conflict resolution

listening

interviewing

trust

general semantics

transactional analysis

nonverbal communication

grape vine

decision making

organizational structure

transaction

leadership

counselling

management theories

team work

influencing attitudes and values

## CONCLUSION

Interpersonal Communication is a relatively new area of study within the field of Speech Communication. It is eclectic both in content and methodology. Since many academic disciplines contribute concepts and frameworks which can be used in the development of interpersonal curricula, confusion can occur concerning the criteria to be used in selecting content for a particular interpersonal class. In this paper three general orientations have been suggested. The Humanistic, Business and Skill oriented classes were introduced as distinct, though not mutually exclusive approaches.

Regretfully, the theme of this paper has been presented in embryonic form. It is hoped, however, that readers may pursue the notions suggested, and that a consideration of these interpersonal orientations may be found useful in planning programs and classes.